

Exposing truth Shoshone woman's life-long mission

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CLEARFIELD, Utah (AP) — Mae Timbimboo Parry will never forget nights as a child at her grandfather's feet. While winter winds moaned outside, she listened in horrified fascination as he spoke of the Bear River Massacre.

Six decades later, Parry, the 70-year-old tribal secretary to the Northwestern Shoshone, traces her life-long mission to reveal the truth about the Army's slaughter of as many as 400 Indians in 1863 to the hours spent listening to Yeager Timbimboo, one of the few survivors.

"He was the best story teller. He believed in passing his stories on to his grandchildren, and he expected them to memorize all of them. He'd tell them over and over and over again," Parry said.

"We sat on the floor and grandpa sat on the chair. Every few minutes he would ask, 'Are you awake? Are you awake?' " she recalled.

"And we would say yes. If one of us fell asleep, grandpa would just get up and leave. So we stayed awake. He wanted us to know who we were and where we came from."

Yeager, 12 when the soldiers attacked, survived and lay still in the blood-spattered snow until a soldier realized he was alive. The soldier let him live.

"He must have been spared for this purpose. If my grandfather had died, it (the truth) may have been lost," said Parry, who has passed Yeager's stories on to her five children and more than a dozen grandchildren.

The account of the attack by the man who launched it, Col. Patrick Connor, was one of pitched battle and classic military envelopment against well-armed and entrenched warriors, a view reflected — to the abiding anger of the Northwestern Shoshone — on a historical marker commemorating the "Battle of Bear River."

In the years after she first heard the Bear River stories, Parry became a repository for the tribe's oral history on the massacre. Eventually, she blended her grandfather's stories with others in what is considered by historians to be an authoritative 1976 monograph on file at the Utah State Historical Society in Salt Lake City.

Government ready to admit massacre

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BEAR RIVER, Idaho (AP) — More than a century after the blood of hundreds of Northwestern Shoshones soaked the snowy banks of the Bear River, the federal government may be ready to admit its soldiers perpetrated a massacre unrivaled in the annals of the West.

Since Jan. 29, 1863, this site 110 miles north of Salt Lake City has been known for the "Battle of Bear River," described by Col. Patrick Connor as a glorious struggle won by classic military tactics and superior firepower.

Ignored were persistent Shoshone claims to the contrary. Survivors recounted Connor's "battle" as a day of savagery in which soldiers smashed infants' skulls, raped dying squaws and dispatched the wounded with bullets, clubs and axes.

Connor lost 14 of his 200 men. An estimated 270 to 400 Shoshones died, two-thirds of them women and children.

Edwin C. Bearss, chief historian for the National Park Service, says that after extensive study, he agrees history should be rewritten to reflect the Shoshone account.

"The attack was sharp, sudden and vigorous. There were heavy casualties," he said. "A good case can be made that there were more Indian casualties in this attack than any other by U.S. forces west of the Mississippi."



AP Laserphoto

Allie Hansen stands next to historical marker at massacre site just north of the Utah-Idaho border.

As for Connor's version, Bearss says history is replete with lies or omissions made to paint heroic

A variety of sources, including Army reports, books and carefully preserved tribal oral histories, strengthened by Mormon scout Orrin Porter Rockwell, bodyguard of pioneer Brigham Young. Rockwell,



AP Laserphoto

Mae Timbimboo Parry says her quest is near realization with a government historian's support for her claims.

How Karen Adams of Provo

Bear River was "much more grim" than better-known Indian massacres at Sand Creek, in Colorado Territory, where 133 Cheyennes were killed by troopers Nov. 28, 1864, and at Wounded Knee, S.D., where soldiers slaughtered 153 Sioux on Dec. 28, 1890, Bearss said. But any news of the attack was pushed out of most newspapers by dispatches from fierce Civil War battles that killed tens of thousands at Fredericksburg, Va., and Stone's River, Tenn.

Estimates of how many Indians died at Bear River vary because no official count was made. Tradition has it that Connor counted bodies from horseback and recorded 220-270 dead. Settlers who went in later found many more bodies in ravines or under deep snow and put the number as high as 500. The tribe says 400 of their number were killed. No more than 60 escaped or survived.

On April 3, Bearss will recommend that the site, just outside Preston, Idaho, be granted National Historic Landmark status as the "Bear River Massacre." If it passes muster with the agency's advisory panel, the proposal will be sent to Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan Jr., probably in May.

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Young schoolchildren should not be exposed to a jail 40 yards from their facility, it's highly inappropriate," said Mayor Martin Dunn,

pictures. Connor and his California Volunteers had signed up to fight Johnny Reb; their posting to the Great Basin to protect Mormon settlers and keep an eye on Indians was galling.

Attacking an Indian village was a poor substitute for battlefield glory, but it was all the ambitious Connor had to impress his superiors.

"If I was a colonel," Bearss said, "it would be to my career's benefit if I portrayed (Bear River) as a pitched battle. As a career soldier, you're looking for career success, and body counts have always been important."

In late January 1863, hundreds of Indians had set up tepees at "Bia Ogoi," or Bear River, for the Warm Dance, an annual winter ritual to drive away the cold.

The night of Jan. 27, one tribal elder awoke from a nightmarish vision: The white man's pony soldiers were slaughtering his people. Tin Dup, convinced this was a warning from the Great Spirit, told anyone who would listen to flee.

"Do it now! Tonight!" he begged them.

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Connor sent his cavalry across the river, determined to cut off any retreat. As the infantry closed in, the Indians ran for the ice-clogged river. Its banks soon were bloody with wounded and dead. Squaws, many with infants strapped to their backs, joined the desperate plunge. Most drowned, others were shot as they swam. A few escaped.

Sagwitch, wounded in one hand, tumbled into the river and floated under some brush. After nightfall, he and a few warriors found ponies and fled north.

Back in camp, soldiers took babies by the heels and dashed them to death. Squaws, helpless from their wounds, were raped even as they died.

Another chief, Bear Hunter, endured a savage beating. His wife, Be-ah-wa-a-chee, who watched from her concealment in nearby willows, recalled that Bear Hunter did not cry out, even when soldiers rammed a heated bayonet through his head, ear to ear.

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who would watch the bloodshed from the safety of the bluffs, had told Connor that up to 600 Shoshone warriors were battle ready, according to a 1985 history.

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